



## A Continuous Daylight Portrait

by Ben Clay

Indoor portraiture can be very rewarding if you can overcome the pitfalls associated with it. Low light conditions, improper camera settings and color imbalance are all factors to contend with while attempting to capture natural looking results of your subjects.

With advances in camera functionality and lighting equipment, it is easier than ever to come away with spectacular results for any indoor shooting situation. Here, I wanted to demonstrate how you do not necessarily need a lot of lighting equipment to create beautiful, classic portraits. For this shoot, my lighting set-up never extended beyond a soft box and a reflector.

### The Main Light with Tungsten

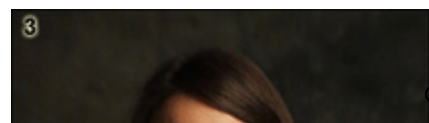
To start, I attached a medium soft box to a continuous lighting unit and placed it off to the side of my model. The nice thing about working with a continuous light is that you can see the effects of the light prior to taking the picture. Here, the model stood about 10 feet in front of a muslin backdrop, supported by a background support kit (figures 1 & 2).



The reason I had the model so far in front of the backdrop was twofold:

- 1) I wanted the background to be fairly dark for this portrait. If I had the model stand closer to the backdrop, the light from the main light would have brightened it considerably.
- 2) I wanted to have the background be soft (out of focus) in order to draw more attention to the model. Shooting with a wide-open aperture and having some distance between your subject and background will allow you to achieve this look. For a more selective focus look, I decided to attach a Lensbaby 3G lens to the camera. This lens is unique in that it allows you to tilt, shift and lock down your plane of focus and create a very shallow depth of field, similar to that of a large format view camera.

Once the light was where I wanted it, I adjusted the camera settings to the following:



- Exposure Mode: Manual
- Aperture: f/8\*
- Shutter Speed: 1/80th of a second
- ISO: 400
- Focus: Manual
- Format: RAW

Once the model was ready, I took my first shot (figure 3).

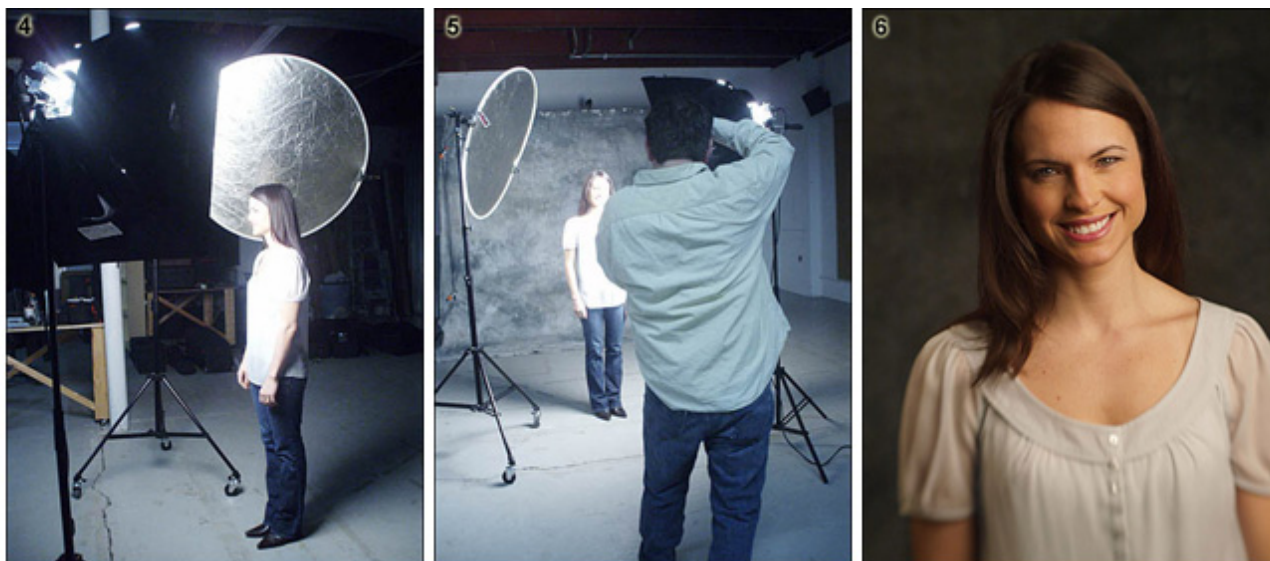
\*The Lensbaby lens comes with various-sized aperture rings that you can physically place on top of the glass lens. As such, you cannot make aperture adjustments through the camera.



As you can see from the result, the effects of the soft box are very similar to that of window light. The features of the model are rendered softly and naturally, and the backdrop is nicely understated. Not bad for just one light! Also notice how the focus falls off toward the bottom of the frame. This effect is due to the angled lens positioning of the Lensbaby lens.

### Reducing Contrast with a Fill Light

Next, I decided to add just a little fill to the shadow side of the model to minimize the contrast somewhat. I attached a soft gold reflector to a reflector holder and light stand and positioned it on the opposite side of the model. I then used it to bounce light from the main light into the shadows (figures 4 & 5).

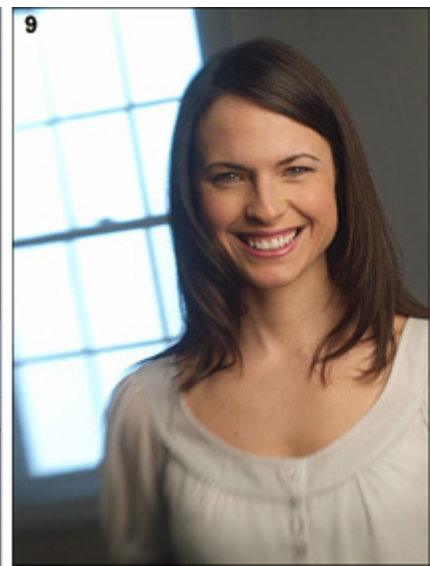


Once the reflector was positioned where I wanted it, I took another shot (figure 6).

The effects of the reflector, although subtle, were just what I was looking for. It bounced just enough light into the shadows to add detail, but not so much that it would detract from the overall mood of the shot. The result is a very classic look with just one light and a reflector.

### Mixing Daylight with Tungsten

For the next shot, I wanted to change the look of the background and decided to use a paned window in the room I was shooting in. I moved the soft box and reflector over toward the window, positioned them just as I had in the previous shot and framed up the shot (figures 7 and 8).



Once I found a composition I liked, I took another shot (figure 9).

Notice the lighting effects of this shot. While the light on the model looks good, just as it did in the previous shot, the light on the background has a color balance issue. Specifically, the daylight coming through the window is very blue. This is because the color temperature of daylight (5500K) is much higher and bluer than that of the Tungsten light (3200K).

The White Balance in the camera here was set to balance for Tungsten lights, which it did with the model, but with the background, it rendered it too blue. This is a classic example of color imbalance due to mixed lighting conditions.

### Switching to Grayscale

One option you have when shooting in mixed light conditions is to shoot in black and white. In a grayscale shooting space, it doesn't matter what the color temperatures are, since you will only be concerned with tones.



In this situation, I changed the color mode in the camera to Monotone (grayscale) and took another series of shots (figure 10).

This one ended up being one of my favorites (figure 11).

### Balancing with Daylight

But let's say that you want to shoot the scene in color. What do you do? Well, the easiest way to balance color

in this scenario is to change out the Tungsten lamp with a daylight-balanced lamp. And that's just what I did here (figure 12).



With the main light now at the same color temperature as the light coming through the window (roughly 5500K), I changed the White Balance in the camera to Daylight (also 5500K). This ensured that every element of the frame was color-balanced.

Once the main light was powered up, I took my final series of shots (figures 13 & 14).

The result below ended up being one of my favorites of this series. Notice how the daylight lamp has rendered beautiful skin tones and that it balances perfectly with the light coming through the rear window (figure 15).



With the right lighting and camera gear, and a little know-how, you can create beautiful, natural looking portraits with ease. Remember to experiment with your gear and techniques, and above all, have fun!

---

Ben Clay is the Lead Instructor for Web Photo School and has worked for Photoflex and Web Photo School for close to a decade producing online lessons, photo magazine articles, conducting seminars and product demonstrations on various types of photographic, lighting and digital techniques. Prior to that, he worked as a commercial photographer, shooting everything from models to commercial products to architectural room scenes. His clients have included L.L. Bean, Cole Haan, J.Jill, Talbots, Cuddledown, and others.